Contents

Preface and Dedication vii
Acknowledgments xi

INTRODUCTION

Daily Life and Women’s History 5
Overview of the Jewish Community 10

1 IN PUBLIC:
JEWS ARE TURNED INTO PARIAHS, 1933–1938 17
Political Lawlessness and Economic Oppression 18
Daily Life, Daily Deprivations:
Food, Shelter, and Relationships with Other Germans 32
Jewish Reactions in Public: Jewish Social Life and Jewishness 46

2 IN PRIVATE: THE DAILY LIVES OF
JEWISH WOMEN AND FAMILIES, 1933–1938 50
Accommodation and Conformity in Private Life 50
The “Duty” of the Jewish Woman: The Household 54
The “Duty” of the Jewish Woman:
The Challenges of New Roles and the Tenacity of Old Ones 57
The Emigration Quandary 62

3 JEWISH AND “MIXED”, FAMILIES 74
Engagement, Marriage, and the Decision to Build a Family 74
“Mixed” Marriages and “Mixed” Families 83
Divorce 87
# CONTENTS

4 **THE DAILY LIVES OF JEWISH CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN THE “THIRD REICH”**

School 94
Hostile Environment Beyond School 106
Jewish Teens 109
Children Leave Home 116

5 **THE NOVEMBER POGROM AND ITS AFTERMATH**

The Background to November 1938 119
The Pogrom 121
Women’s Roles and Reactions during the Pogrom 125
Emigration 129

6 **WAR AND THE WORSENING SITUATION OF JEWS**

The Immediate Prewar Persecutions 145
Outbreak of War 150
The Bombings: Popular and Jewish Attitudes 160
Jewish Social Life in Wartime 161
Anna and Salomon Samuel:
The Odyssey of One Elderly Jewish Couple 169

7 **FORCED LABOR AND DEPORTATIONS**

Forced Labor 173
Despair and Suicide 179
Deportations: The Transition from Social Death to Physical Annihilation 184

8 **LIFE UNDERGROUND**

Going into Hiding 201
The Dilemmas of an Illegal Life 203
Jewish Resistance 212
Three Accounts of Hiding 216

**CONCLUSION**

Jewish Responses 229
German Perpetrators and Bystanders 232

Notes 239
Bibliography 265
Index 275
I have often been told that historians practice their craft because they love to uncover the past and to tell a good story. Certainly, this was true for me in my prior work. I experienced the excitement of revealing hidden stories, of bringing women's history to the fore and challenging old paradigms. Writing this book, however, provoked different feelings, so different that it is important to me to write about them. This book is one I had to write, but, of all my work, it was the hardest book to write. And this, of course, has everything to do with its topic, the genocide of the Jewish people.

More personally, it has to do with my own background. I was born in January 1946. This means that my parents, refugees from Nazi Germany, waited to start a family until they were experiencing the relief of Germany's defeat, until Russian tanks were winning the Battle of Berlin. My mother had emigrated from Germany in 1936, a twenty-two-year-old with no possibility of pursuing her teaching career after the Nuremberg Laws. My father, who worked as a manager in a store owned by a Jewish family, fled to Holland in 1939 upon being summoned by the police in his hometown. My parents met in America. They counted themselves among the "lucky" ones: my mother rescued her parents, my father's siblings escaped Germany, and his parents died natural deaths. Still, they lost all of their uncles and aunts, as well as cousins and friends. Moreover, those who remained—the German-Jewish diaspora—scattered to the ends of the earth. Our family had relatives in Australia, Canada, England, Israel, Latin America, the Netherlands, South Africa, and even West Germany. Wherever they settled, though, the cloud of Nazi Germany's murderous rejection of them remained, even as they and my parents created new lives.
It was precisely their silence, interspersed with occasional references to Hitler, that intrigued me. I wanted to fill in the missing stories, to try to understand how Jews like my parents grasped the meaning of Nazism. How did they react? How did they negotiate the ever-building tensions? What were their options? This is the focus of my book, not the politics or ideology of the Nazis or the causes of fascism and genocide. Instead, I ask how creeping fascism and blatant antisemitism affected Jews in their daily lives, how Jews coped with the loss of their friends, careers, and businesses, the defeat of their hopes, dreams, and futures. What combination of energy, foresight, and luck did it take to get out in time? What role did gender play in assessing Nazism or reacting to it? Personal incidents and unfolding realizations set against a backdrop of social disintegration may, I believe, give us insight into later startling and cataclysmic events.

In coming to this subject, I took a circuitous route (but one which, it seems, led to the Nazi era), studying German literature as an undergraduate and German history as a graduate student. I wrote a dissertation on the Jewish feminist movement in Germany, as well as a later book on Jewish middle-class life in Imperial Germany. Until this project, I avoided the genocide of the Jews. Writing this book brought me to the greatest tragedy of modern Jewish history and one of the central defining milestones of the twentieth century. Moreover, it brought me face-to-face with the very personal nature of this catastrophe. I cried as I finished reading many memoirs. Sometimes, I could not continue my research for the day. I was overwhelmed with relief when one of my friends read a chapter in which I described the deportation of Polish Jews in October 1938 and she marked in the margin: “My family got out just in time, September.” Some of the letters I used were written by another friend’s grandmother, trapped in Berlin. Sometimes I could only numb myself to the intense pain of the memoirs or letters and to my own connections with them in order to get myself through them.

Thus, this has been an emotionally draining task, but it has also been a labor of love. I am deeply moved by the people I have studied. My respect for them has grown profoundly even when I see—in hindsight—their misreading of Nazi intentions or their self-delusions. One of my friends wondered whether I hadn’t constructed women who were too “plucky.” I wondered, too, as I reread my manuscript. But the interpretation arises from these women’s actions, not from how they framed them in later memoirs or interviews. Despite their inner fears and the acutely depressing nature of the brutality they suffered, they showed enormous outward resolution and energy as they attempted to sustain their families or rescue their
men. Although Jewish women were only partially successful—since all too many Jews were caught in the Nazi genocide—they managed, for the most part, to resist their own despair and to remain the "women of valor" so often acclaimed in Jewish prayer and mythology. I dedicate this book to them.
In 1933, approximately 117,000 Jewish children and youth between the ages of six and twenty-five lived in Germany. Compared with their elders, whose loss of jobs and businesses proceeded erratically, the younger generation faced a more drastic deterioration in conditions at public schools and among non-Jewish friends, often finding their first safe haven in a Jewish school. They also experienced a drastic reduction in their aspirations and lived in tense homes with families on edge. Gender played an important role in children’s and young people’s lives. Parents and Jewish communal organizations held different expectations for girls and boys, and gender framed the ways in which children envisioned their futures. But from 1933 on, both girls and boys had to make unprecedented adjustments in their lives while facing unrelenting assaults on their self-esteem.

SCHOOL

Jewish Children in “Aryanized” Schools

Nazi legislation of April 1933, euphemistically entitled the “Law Against the Overcrowding of German Schools,” established a quota of 1.5 percent total enrollment for Jews. Where Jews made up more than 5 percent of the population, schools could allow up to 5 percent of their pupils\(^1\) to be Jewish. Exemptions included Jewish pupils whose fathers had served during World
War I, children of mixed marriages (with no more than two Jewish grandparents), and Jewish children with foreign citizenship. Elementary school (the Volksschule) attendance remained, for the time being, required for all. Like the other April laws, the actual number of exemptions surprised the Nazis. But for Jews, the exemptions were, at best, a Pyrrhic victory. The massive hostility they faced and practical concerns with learning a vocation forced many to leave school.

Because children spend so much time in school, unprotected by family, Jewish children continually met with the blatant repercussions of Nazism there. Well before Jewish children were expelled from German public schools, the majority lost the rights of non-Jews. They often had to sit apart from classmates. The curriculum isolated them further. In German class, one Jewish teenager had to study literature on the need for German expansion. Titles varied, including the bestseller Volk without Space. In English class, the same girl read news articles from a British pro-Nazi tabloid. Teachers often required essays on Nazi themes. Jews, however, were prohibited from addressing these topics and, instead, were given arbitrary topics that had never been discussed in class. No matter how well an essay was written, a Jewish child seldom received a top grade.

School administrators and teachers barred Jewish children from school events, whether inside or outside school. When Nazi movies were shown, Jewish children could not attend but afterward had to listen while other children discussed the film. Denied school subsidies, they were forbidden from going to swimming pools or sleeping in dormitories on class trips. A mother described her daughter's unhappiness about missing special events: "It was not because she was denied going to the show that my little girl was weeping . . . but because she had to stay apart, as if she were not good enough to associate with her comrades any longer." On Mother's Day, Jewish children had to take part in the school festivities but were not allowed to sing along. When they protested, their teacher responded haughtily: "I know you have a mother . . . but she is only a Jewish mother." On the rare occasion when Jewish children could take part, the "Aryan" children would show up in their Nazi youth group outfits, making it clear who did not belong.

The extent of persecution depended on various factors: whether Jewish children attended urban or rural schools, whether they lived in areas where the Nazis were particularly popular, and what political attitudes their teachers held. Children were more likely to be victimized in small town and village schools. There, non-Jewish children, even if they had wanted to, did not dare to be seen with Jews. Between 1933 and 1935, in a small town in the Mark Brandenburg, no one wanted to sit near a Jewish boy or play with
him during breaks. In a small town near Aachen, a Jewish child suffered the abrupt rupture of her closest friendship—the other child even stopped greeting her—and had to listen to her female teacher make nasty remarks about Jews in class. For many children, public events were not nearly as upsetting as the situation at school, which grew worse and worse. 4

Even in cities, Jewish children experienced at least some animosity. At best, Jewish children retained some of their non-Jewish friends for a short time, while self-identified “Aryan” teachers or classmates were unfriendly. There were segregated Jewish classes in some schools, Jewish benches in “mixed” classrooms in others. In a Berlin elementary school, which was not known for antisemitism and in which almost half the pupils were Jewish, non-Jewish children brought “pails full of soap and water . . . in order to wash the seats clean where the Jewish children had sat.” In a notably rare situation, “Aryans” in a Berlin Gymnasium defended their Jewish friends, resisted singing the bloodthirsty Nazi anthem, and as late as 1936 refused to hail the reoccupation of the Rhineland. Nonetheless, some teachers there insulted Jewish pupils or mumbled Nazi eugenics. 5

Helmut Kallmann’s description of his Berlin high school between 1932 and 1938 manifests both his clear awareness of the political leanings of his teachers and the contradictions confronting Jews. The chemistry teacher, for example, was not an overt antisemite but still told his classes not to purchase their supplies from a Jewish woman’s store. Some teachers simply wore their SA or SS uniforms to class, while others were ideologues who harassed the Jewish teenagers. The biology teacher taught “racial education,” insisting that “the Jew is the Master of the Lie, the King of Crime.” This rhetoric backfired at first, embarrassing the non-Jewish pupils who could not imagine that these insults fit the fathers of their Jewish friends. Ultimately, however, such tirades intimidated Jews and non-Jews alike. By 1937, another Nazi teacher regularly alternated between long-standing antisemitic stereotypes, such as, “What kind of whispering and Yiddish-sounding dialect [Gemauschele] is going on? We’re not in a Jew-school here, you know,” and more novel approaches, such as “Shut your non-Aryan trap.” Strangely enough, there were teachers who missed no opportunity to make sarcastic remarks about Jews but seemed to grade pupils impartially. 6 The behavior of these teachers was replicated all over Germany: official hostility toward “the Jew” but personal tolerance or regard for a particular Jewish person.

Berlin may have provided the best experience for which Jewish children could hope. In Magdeburg, one Jewish girl, only a half year away from achieving the Abitur (final school exam and certification), quit school
because some girls refused to go on a class trip if she, the only Jew, came along. Moreover, she had to sit all alone on a bench separate from the rest of the class. In Düsseldorf, school became increasingly unpleasant for Ruth Sass as her friends buckled under to the pressures of antisemitism: "For the first time in my life, I felt left-out, not wanted, a second-class human being." Worse, "New, younger teachers [were] hired and started to preach the philosophy of the Third Reich." In 1934, when Sass was fifteen years old, her history teacher taught that the Jews were second-class citizens. She asked to be excused from these lessons because she was Jewish. Presumably still believing in her "rights," and attempting polite resistance, she "made a point of always being in front of the classroom door when he came out after his lesson to remind him of my protest." When he told her she had to return to class so he could grade her, she asked that he warn her in advance before making comments about Jews, to allow her to leave the class. They both adhered to this compromise. In biology class, however, the torment continued as the teacher taught about the superiority of the "Aryan" race. One of these lessons, at least, was interspersed with comic relief when the teacher taught the children how to recognize an "Aryan" name. She asked the pupils to state their last names. When it came to the Jewish girl, the teacher declared "Sass," her last name, to come from good "Aryan" stock: "I smiled at her and told her that I was non-Aryan."

Some children more directly resisted the indignities and abuse foisted upon them in the early years. In 1934, Annemarie Scherman, a Berlin "Mischling," confronted a teacher who continually gave her grades of "unsatisfactory." Despite his animosity, she achieved her Abitur a year later. In 1934, in a small town in Ostwestfalen-Lippe, a thirteen-year-old girl attending a school assembly found herself sitting through a Nazi song. When she heard its words,

I was blind with rage and fear.... I got up and decided.... I'm not listening to this. I was pretty certain that they would kill me, grab me and break my bones.... But no one touched me. Somehow, the teachers as well as the pupils must have respected.... my courage. In a German school where discipline was stressed, to get up.... in the midst of a ceremony and simply leave without permission, that was incredible.

This kind of opposition took a great deal of courage, because German teachers did not brook disobedience from pupils, especially Jewish pupils. Indeed, such protest was short-lived and was ultimately useless against the power of the state.
Well before legislation forced them out, Jewish adolescents over the age of fourteen (after which attendance was no longer compulsory) left school in droves. While some pupils had to consider nonacademic career alternatives and others emigrated, most fled the insufferable atmosphere there. In Württemberg, only 10 percent of Jews attending higher schools were affected by the April laws of 1933, yet shortly thereafter 58 percent left school because of massive hostility. In Berlin, 5,931 Jewish youths attended higher schools in May 1933; two years later, only 1,172 remained. Statistics for Prussia indicate that there were 8,609 Jewish boys and 6,317 Jewish girls in public higher schools in May 1932, and that only 28 percent of boys and 26 percent of girls remained by May 1936, with girls dropping out at a slightly greater rate. Jewish university students also suffered discrimination, whether by having to sit on separate “Jewish” benches or in the back of the lecture hall or, as at the Friedrich Wilhelm University of Berlin, by having a yellow stripe stamped in their matriculation books. The result was that while 3,950 Jewish students (2,698 men and 1,252 women) matriculated at German universities in the summer of 1932, by the summer of 1934 only 656 (486 men and 170 women) were left. 9

School was not only a daily trial but also the site where some children learned of their “Jewish” identity according to Nazi law. Five-year-old Rita Kuhn, whose father was Jewish and mother Christian, was uncertain of her own religion. In school “the teacher had to ask the whole class who’s Jewish. I looked around the classroom and nobody raised [a] hand.... I wasn’t really sure whether I was Jewish .... I raised my hand, because .... I knew I had something to do with being Jewish.” After that, of course, she had no chance of joining the League of German Girls (Bund deutscher Mädels, or BDM). When her teacher asked who wanted to join, “I raised my hand. I mean, who doesn’t want to be part of a group?” Her teacher explained, gently, that she could not belong. “I couldn’t understand what was the matter with me,” she recalled. In the fall of 1933, a ten-year-old in her first year of a girls’ upper school was given a homework assignment to find out the “racial” background of her grandparents. Although she had been baptized, her family had not observed any religion. At this point her parents acknowledged her mother’s Jewish origins, attempting to sweeten the blow by assuring the girl that she was a descendant of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. 10

Discovering a Jewish “racial” identity was a shock for children, just as it was for adults. But children also felt betrayed by their parents. A Protestant born in 1923, for example, recalled the anguish she felt at this discovery at age thirteen: “My parents had outright lied to me.... They didn’t tell me
until the day my school [required] an ‘Aryan certificate.’” Another child, born in 1929, found out that she was “Jewish” from the taunts of a classmate. When she announced to her father that he would have to come to defend her at school the next day: “My parents glanced at each other... and my mother (who had converted to Protestantism...) said: ‘And what if that were the case?’ At that I began to scream and was sick for four weeks... I could not cope with it.”

Although Jewish children received the brunt of abuse from their peers, half-Jewish children were not exempt. In Hamburg, a “half-Aryan” boy raised as a Protestant had to be hospitalized for two months because of the constant physical and emotional persecution he experienced in school. Thereafter his parents saw no alternative but to enroll him in an Orthodox Jewish school. For a few children, their Jewishness and the hostile school atmosphere ended in tragedy. One Hamburg woman described her nephew’s tormented reaction to the new conditions at school:

[He] used to greet us when he came home from school with “Heil Hitler.” He [declared] he did not want to be a Jew and that he did not believe in being one. He wanted to march with the other boys... and join the Hitler Youth. One day he came home from school complaining of having been struck on the head by his chum who [had] called him “dirty Jew!” He had a severe headache and his father gave him aspirin which did not relieve him. Trying to help himself to more aspirin, he picked up the veronal bottle by mistake, and overdosed himself with the sedative... [H]e became delirious. He kept shouting “Heil Hitler,” which were the last words we heard him say.

The Effects of School on the Family

The pain of children—who often faced antisemitism from classmates and teachers—disturbed both women and men profoundly as parents, but women coped with their children’s distress more directly than did the men. Children told their mothers the latest incidents. Principals summoned mothers to pick up their children when they were expelled from school—often more than once—and mothers then searched for new schools. Mothers were usually the ones whom teachers phoned when children were excluded from class events or received grades beneath their actual achievement level. In a small city in Baden, a female teacher sent Verena Hellwig a letter regarding her daughter’s grades:
Today we were informed at a teachers' meeting that Jews or Mischlinge could no longer receive prizes for their achievements. Because your little daughter is the best pupil in the class, she will be affected by these measures. I'm informing you in order that you can tell Irene, so that she won't be surprised and too hurt during tomorrow's awards ceremony. You know how close your little daughter and I are, but, unfortunately, there is no way that I can counter this hurtful and unjust policy.

Her daughter was upset but insisted on going to the prize ceremony anyway because it was not her fault “if they make such mean laws.” Even Nazi teachers might phone a child's mother when the child was to be excluded. One mother wrote: “I believe that the Nazi teacher was ashamed of herself now and then, when she looked into the sad eyes of my little daughter, because she phoned me several times and asked that I not send the child to school on the days when something enjoyable had been planned for the children.”

Sympathetic teachers were not uncommon in the early years. Yet the threat to job security made those who had earlier shown sympathy more careful later on—behavior that was multiplied a thousandfold in the German population. When a Jewish girl had to leave public school in Wiesbaden, she asked her teacher to write a few lines in her autograph album. The teacher happily complied for her favorite pupil, but a few days later the principal asked to see the girl's mother. He feared that the teacher's affection for a Jewish child could endanger her career if the authorities found out. Clearly ashamed of himself, he asked that the girl remove the page from her album and give it to him.

Mothers also supervised their children's homework. One can imagine the contradictory emotions of a Jewish mother who was reassured to learn that her son had sung patriotic songs, said “Heil Hitler” to the teacher, and received praise for his laudatory essay about Hitler: “[His] gross political miseducation at school would keep [him] out of trouble.” About a year later the same child, now enrolled in a Jewish school, wrote a story about Jewish resistance as a Mother's Day gift for his mother. Upon reading it, she was frightened: “[His] political awakening . . . could lead to trouble for the whole family.” Another mother, in a small southern German town, commented on the lies that her children were expected to echo in their homework assignments:

There were . . . compositions with delicate subjects, and they were not allowed to put down a contradictory opinion. Sometimes a judicious teacher gave a selection of subjects . . . but . . . all the children knew what
they were expected to write. It was bad enough that this kind of state's education taught them to hate, to despise, to be suspicious, to denounce, but worst of all perhaps was this...lying.\footnote{15}

Young children often shared their bewilderment openly with parents. Little ones found it agonizing not to be part of the group. When asked in late 1933 what he would wish for, a seven-year-old answered “To be a Nazi.” When his father asked what would happen to the rest of the family, he responded that he wished they could be Nazis too. This is the same child whose teacher noted that he flinched every time the Nazi flag was raised. Another little boy, referring to his circumcision, confided to his father that he wished he were a girl. Then the other children would not know immediately that he was a Jew.\footnote{16}

Older children kept more of their pain to themselves, hiding their feelings and some of the more troubling events in their daily school lives from their already overburdened parents, who had “no time and too much angst.” In a small town in Ostwestfalen-Lippe, the only Jewish girl in the school had enthusiastically participated in swimming exercises in the gym all winter long. When spring came, the class was to go to the public pool to actually swim. With sadness, her female teacher told her she could not join the class. “You know why you cannot go with us to the park swimming pool?” And I said, ‘yes, I know.’ I did not cry. For a minute, I believe, I wanted to die.... Curiously, I was hurt more for my parents than for myself.” Children’s attempts to spare their parents notwithstanding, mothers, and probably fathers too (to the extent their wives did not shelter them), surmised what was happening. The Protestant mother of two “Mischling” children noticed that many of her daughter’s friends no longer came to their home: “Loneliness enveloped us more and more each day.”\footnote{17}

Often, children had to walk a tightrope between the demands of parents and school. In one small town, the elementary school teacher insisted that Jewish children give the Nazi salute. The parents advised the children not to do so. The teacher threatened the Jewish children with the wrath of their “Aryan” schoolmates: “I am not responsible if the children turn against you.”... And then, after a short time, we went along, cooperated, and didn’t mention it at home.” Another Jewish child whose parents had forbidden him from giving the Nazi salute was simply delighted when he was forced to do so in school.\footnote{18}

Unlike Jewish teens, Jewish children younger than fourteen could not simply leave school. Why did they remain in public schools as long as they did, when, as early as 1934, the Central Organization of German Jews
reported that many Jewish children were showing signs of psychological disturbance? Clearly, there were practical reasons: the Jewish community could not build Jewish schools as quickly as they were needed, and the public schools had acquired reputations for educational competence. Moreover, some Jews still lived in towns in which the population of Jews was too small to support a Jewish school.

A gender-specific dimension also appears to be involved: while mothers had grave trepidations, fathers exhorted the children to remain in school. Toni Lessler, the founder and director of a Montessori school in Berlin, which became a Jewish school when the government forbade "Aryan" children from attending it, described the attitudes of Jewish families:

The ... city schools became ever more difficult for the Jewish children and ever more unbearable. But there were still many parents who wanted to give children the advantage of a city school. If the parents had only guessed what the children had to go through there ... And it must probably have been a false pride which caused the fathers in particular to keep their children in city schools ..."}

Lessler pointed not only to fathers' aspirations to give their children a quality education but also to their "stand-tough" approach.

Memoirs also attest to fathers' unrealistic hopes that their children would not suffer and to their insistence that their children "tough it out" and develop "thicker skin." When a sixteen-year-old, the only Jewish girl in her class, balked at participating in a class trip, aware that the class would eat at a hotel that displayed a "Jews Undesired" placard, her mother supported her. The mother dreaded the anxiety and pain her daughter might experience—"she'll worry about what might happen during the entire trip"—but her father insisted that she participate. Another father knew the horrid details of his son's school experience but did not seem to fathom the child's emotional state. When this father finally agreed to remove the child from the school, the ten-year-old proclaimed: "Father ... had you continued to force me to go to a school—I would have thrown myself under a train." The father confessed: "My hair stood on end with fear, cold chills ran down my spine. What must have been going on in the soul of a small, innocent child?"

These gender-specific reactions in which men wished to stand firm were often exacerbated by a division of roles in which husbands made ultimate family decisions even though their wives were more aware of their children's emotional states. In fact, fathers may have been making crucial decisions in the dark, since wives frequently kept the worst from them, knowing
the men's lives outside the home were bitter enough. Also, boys, taught to be "manly," may have remained more silent than did the girls. One boy remembered coming home often to his mother's admonition, "Don't talk to your father," who was very upset.22

**Jewish Schools**

Harassment, as well as expulsions from public schools, provoked many families to enroll their children in Jewish schools. In 1933, there were about 60,000 school-aged Jewish children (between the ages of six and fourteen) in Germany. As a result of the Nazi takeover, the proportion of Jewish children attending Jewish schools leaped from 14 percent in 1932, to 23 percent in 1934, and to 52 percent in 1936. To keep up with demand, the communities provided 130 schools by 1935 and 160 (with over 1,200 teachers) by 1936. In 1937, Jewish schools peaked at 167, serving about 60 percent of Jewish children (23,670). Still, a significant proportion of Jewish children between the ages of six and fourteen remained in the public elementary schools, subject to torment by teachers and other children, until the Nazis barred their attendance in November 1938.23

The Central Organization of German Jews, parents, and Jewish communities supported Jewish schools with ever-smaller means, trying to maintain a sizeable pool of teachers while more and more teachers emigrated. In small towns, school accommodations were meager. In Pforzheim, near the Black Forest, the Jewish "school," located within the public school building, consisted of two classrooms with children of different ages; the Jewish children had to use a separate entrance. Large cities offered more educational variety, with Berlin providing the most. Berlin had one Jewish *Oberschule* (upper grades), one *Mittelschule* (fifth through tenth grades), eight *Volksschulen* (elementary grades), a school for the hearing- and speech-impaired, and a school for disabled children. Also, the Reform and Orthodox communities had their own schools.24

Private Jewish schools—not subsidized by the Jewish communities or organizations—grew considerably. Toni Lessler's "Private Jewish School Grunewald," for example, grew from 140 to 425 children as Jews fled the public schools. She rented a bigger building and, in 1938, added a Home Economics School. She also received permission to add higher grades (*Oberschule*) so that pupils could study for the *Abitur* and the Oxford English exam. All Jewish schools were under the direct supervision of the Nazi school bureaucracy. Thus, a graduate of the Jewish *Gymnasium* in Breslau received a diploma that displayed "under the logo of the school—a Star of David—the official seal of the board of education—a swastika."
And, even in Jewish schools children on occasion had to listen to Hitler’s speeches, which, according to one participant, could be “real torture.” Moreover, the authorities, ever respectful of the comfort of “Aryan” neighbors, compelled Jewish schools to follow strict regulations about outdoor activities, and sometimes, without notice, required Jewish administrators to decrease the number of children in attendance.²⁵

Along with a traditional German curriculum, Jewish schools taught Judaism and Jewish history and culture. Sometimes Jewish children learned about Judaism or celebrated the holidays for the first time at these schools. As Lotte Kaliski, founder of the (private) Kaliski School in Berlin, noted: “Most of us came from very assimilated families and so did the children, but we understood that in order to give children a more positive attitude, they had to know something about their background.” Some private schools offered unconventional curricula: they prepared children for both the British matriculation exams and the American College Board exams; because Palestine, too, was a likely destination, they also gave courses in gardening and Hebrew.²⁶

Although some Jewish observers regretted that Jewish schools further segregated Jews—“this way, the antisemites had achieved their goal, alienation and separation from the surrounding Christian world”—the Jewish schools also provided immediate relief for most children. Toni Lessler wrote about a nine-year-old girl who asked her “whether we used special pens for our written work, because with us she could write every word so easily, it seemed to her as if the words flowed from the pen, and in the other school they had always remained stuck in the pen because of fear.” Recalling his relief at entering a Jewish school as a fifteen-year-old, one man later wrote: “There was no longer a picture of the Führer . . . no unfair brawls and no Nazi fighting songs. Liberated, I was allowed to breathe freely.” This sense of safety could lead to anti-Nazi pranks. Arnold Paucker recalled how two friends regularly imitated Hitler and Goebbels to uproarious laughter from their schoolmates. Although the teachers objected to such dangerous antics, these same teachers discreetly celebrated the world championship of the Jewish boxer Max Baer over the German Max Schmeling by canceling school for one day.²⁷

Their happiness among other Jews notwithstanding, Jewish children learned to expect radical change at any time: new teachers, new classmates, and new curricula; occasionally, the arrest of one of their fathers; and the disappearance of classmates as families emigrated without notice. About two-thirds of Jewish children and youth left Germany between 1933 and September 1939. One Jewish school in Berlin exemplifies the enormous
changes Jewish children had to face. At the end of 1932–33, 470 children attended the Jewish middle school on Grosse Hamburgerstrasse. Two weeks later, at the beginning of the new school year, the enrollment burgeoned to 840, and one year later it rose to 1,025. Then a rapid decline set in. As families fled, attendance dropped to 380 by the spring of 1939.28

Emigration became a recurrent theme in Jewish schools. In 1934, a teacher at the Theodor Herzl School in Berlin asked her class how many families planned to leave Germany. Seven years old at the time, Ann Lewis later reported:

Nearly every hand went up. What amazes me now . . . is not the fact that apparently as early as the middle of 1934 so many families were planning to leave Germany, but that a whole class of seven-year-olds was aware of the situation and that our teacher expected us to be aware of it. We all knew what "auswandern" meant, and I cannot help wondering how many children in a class of similar age in an ordinary German elementary school would at that time have known the meaning of the word "emigration."

Shlomo Wahrman reported that in his Jewish school in 1936 "only one of the more than thirty pupils questioned responded that his family planned to remain in Leipzig for the time being."

Jewish children in public schools where teachers did not discuss emigration were also aware of Jewish flight. Daily, they watched their Jewish classmates’ and neighbors depart. In Berlin, children saw large moving vans in their neighborhoods, particularly in the Jewish areas: "The vans were labeled . . . with the destinations: Shanghai, Sydney and many cities in North and South America." Ruth Klüger’s experience in Vienna was typical of many children. Born in 1931, she attended eight different schools between the ages of six and ten. The decreased enrollments as children and teachers emigrated forced Jewish schools to merge. She recalled that what most interested her when she arrived at school each morning was how many other pupils had vanished. Then the remaining pupils would be transferred to another school and would have to get used to new teachers, as they, too, emigrated.29

Jewish children who attended Jewish schools lived a dual existence: safety in school and danger outside. But, on occasion, Nazis did not hesitate from threatening Jewish children even within the confines of Jewish schools. The Home Economics School of the League of Jewish Women, for example, a boarding school that had expanded from fifty to eighty girls immediately after the Nazi seizure of power, was situated in a relatively
secluded area. Its low profile notwithstanding, one night a car stopped in front of the school and men threw rocks through the bedroom windows. Although none of the residents were hurt, all were badly frightened. Similarly, children in a Jewish camp found that in 1934 local Nazis had painted the slogans “Jews Are Our Misfortune” and “Death to Jewish Race Defilers” directly across from the camp’s entrance. In 1935, a group of forty to fifty Nazis gathered in front of the main camp building shouting racist slogans.

Inside the building, we felt that we were under siege. We were convinced that the Nazis would break into the camp grounds at any moment. ... The thirty minutes we had spent in a state of terror affected many of the young campers emotionally. Some were too fearful ... to leave the camp premises. ... It was not much of a vacation for them.

**HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT BEYOND SCHOOL**

Although Jewish schools maintained a veneer of normalcy, Jewish children faced hardship elsewhere. Toni Lessler described several incidents that exemplify the psychological stress children regularly faced en route to school. In one case, a little boy got up for an elderly woman in the tram. She thanked him by saying: “So, my good boy, that’s the way a true Hitler Youth behaves. That was nice of you.” Frightened, the little boy responded, “But I’m not a Hitler Youth, I’m a Jewish boy,” and then quickly stepped off the tram. In a more alarming incident, a man dressed in Nazi uniform angrily demanded that a Jewish boy get off a bus. The driver, however, argued that no laws forbade Jews from riding the buses, and others agreed. Enraged, the Nazi departed. The boy was left worrying about future confrontations. Girls were not protected by their sex any more than young children were by their age. One woman recalled how adolescents on the streets of Berlin jeered “Jewish cow” at her and pressed “tickets to Jerusalem” into her hands. In Berlin, a gang of boys attacked even a six-year-old Jewish girl. Jewish teachers constantly reminded children to be quiet and unobtrusive on the streets; to walk in twos, not groups; and to avoid lingering in front of the school.

Parental debates about emigration must have increased strain among beleaguered children, those who hoped to leave, as well as those who hoped to stay. They faced hostility in Germany if they stayed, and strange surroundings, foreign languages, and new faces if they fled. Some children, especially teenagers, realized the dangers from incidents they confronted in and out of school and implored their parents to emigrate. Ruth Sass told
her parents of her experiences in school and pressed them to leave Germany. She was frustrated with their response:

They looked bewildered. How could they pack up and leave everything that was . . . dear to them, and where to? How could they start a new business in a strange country, not knowing the language, and which country was willing to let them immigrate? Uppermost in my mother's mind was that she would not leave her mother behind alone.

Sadly, she admitted defeat: "It became more and more clear to me that I had to leave Germany, my home, my parents, the nice secure life that I knew." She left Germany on her own to finish her schooling in Geneva.33

Children also internalized tensions from home. In Leipzig, the children of Orthodox Jews, aware that their father was still engaged in the ritual slaughter of animals long after the Nazis had forbidden it, registered the anxiety on their mother's face and worried about the family's safety if their father got caught. Ann Lewis recalled the Hebrew classes in her home that her parents took with other potential émigrés. When her parents decided against going to Palestine, the lessons suddenly switched to English, with the accompanying anxiety over whether that would be the right language after all.34

Children listened carefully and read their parents' worried faces. If they came from politically aware families, they immediately understood the meaning of Hitler. Born in 1922, Inge Deutschkron recalled that in light of her socialist upbringing she knew how dangerous Hitler was as soon as he came to power. Others noticed the sudden changes in their families' financial condition as they were drafted to work in family shops. Some children picked up more unusual clues. When a religious boy observed his mother breaking the Sabbath in order to help those in acute need, he understood: "My mother had always been a scrupulous Shabbos observer. Therefore, watching her . . . cooking and baking on Shabbos, had a profound effect on me. . . . The dangers and uncertainties of our own existence became crystal clear to me."35

Children not only were aware of the political and social situation of their families but also experienced rejection directly from other children. They were perhaps even more deeply hurt than their parents. A thirteen-year-old who had had many girlfriends "was forced to be alone. When I got home, I turned to my homework immediately." Some of these wounds lasted a lifetime. Marion Gardner, born in 1931, wrote: "I was lonely, and until today . . . it is hard for me to make friends. . . . It didn't take long until one got used to not being allowed to be together with other Germans." When
Gardner's Jewish cousin from England visited her and decided she did not have to avoid Germans because she was from abroad, the two Jewish girls played with German girls. Local boys discovered this transgression and threw stones at them. When the cousin entered an ice cream parlor with the German girls, Gardner was afraid to follow them. Teased by her cousin, she finally joined them; to her surprise, nothing happened. The memory of her fear, however, endured.36

As the stone-throwing incident shows, the lawlessness that oppressed adults also extended to children. When a young girl was beaten up by her former girlfriend, she fought back. The "Aryan" girl told her: "'You're a Jew, you can't fight back.' So I went to my father and asked him, and he said he didn't think so either—and then I understood." Boys, who were more likely to get into frays, found such warnings even more painful. One boy, "the strongest in the class," "got into a scrap the first day that I was confronted with my new name, Saujude [Jewish swine]." He was hurt to meet with his family's reproach, even that of his uncle, a boxer: "His father could be a big Nazi. This could bring ruin to all of us. Don't ever do that again!" Sometimes this kind of frustration resulted in children turning their anger against their parents. One person wrote of hating the swastika and the Nazi flag and "everything connected with it. . . . I could not look at it without becoming furious. I became incensed and would take it out even upon my poor mother in rudeness."38

Perhaps only sleep provided a respite, as the dream of an eight-year-old illustrates. In the dream, classmates showed her their Nazi swastika pins, taunting her that she could not have any. She replied that she could and produced an armband full of swastikas. The children protested, and the teacher tore it away from her and said she could not wear it. Triumphantly, she announced that Hitler had met her, had said she was a good child, and had given her all the swastikas. Thereafter, the teacher and children were kind to her.38

Older children paid closer attention to the media than they might normally have done: one wrote that he read the newspapers carefully at the age of thirteen and worried about the plight of Jews in Germany. Those who did not experience acute dread at least felt diffuse anxiety. One woman remembered: "The adults had been acting differently for some time. All were full of anxiety, seemed to be afraid of something that threatened their existence. And wherever two persons met, they became lost in endless discussions." Thus, Jewish children grew up quickly. Recalling her fear of the Nazis as early as 1932, a woman remembered: "I stood . . . with my ten years and thought, 'Now your childhood is over.'" By 1936, fourteen-year-old
Miriam Carlebach had regularly noticed antisemitic signs and newspapers, parades of the Hitler Youth, and boycotts of Jewish shops. Her favorite non-Jewish neighbors had grown distant, and an antisemitic landlord had forced her family to relocate. Many of her relatives were fleeing. In early 1938, at sixteen, she decided on her own that the time had come to leave Germany for Palestine.39

JEWISH TEENS

In 1933, about 58,000 Jewish “youth,” between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four, lived in Germany. Adolescents and young adults needed and had more freedom than children but faced new challenges. In Düsseldorf, Ruth Sass noted: “Every few months a new situation presented itself and had to be overcome like another hurdle.” Still, in 1933 and 1934 she was “able to lead a normal life. I could go ice skating in the winter and . . . swimming in the . . . indoor pools of the city. And a group of girls and boys got together and had dancing lessons. I also had my first boyfriend.” In big cities, the more fearless could still go to a café or see a movie, at least until November 1938. However, a relaxing excursion with Jewish friends could turn into a confrontation. In Danzig, for example, when a group of young Jews in their early twenties went to a beer garden, they were threatened by German patrons, who accused one of them, a blond Jewish woman, of being a whore because she associated with Jews. One of their mothers reported: “I trembled when my son left the house, you could never be certain that something [terrible] wouldn’t happen.”40

Increasingly, Jewish youth groups became an important source of comradeship, distraction, and hope for young people. Before 1933, many Jewish children and youth had belonged to nonsectarian groups, with Jewish organizations appealing only to a minority. In 1932 about 26,000 people, or 25 to 30 percent of Jewish youth, belonged to Jewish associations. These groups were divided among those interested in German culture (for example, the non-Zionist Kameraden, founded in 1916); those with a religious orientation (the orthodox Esra, also founded in 1916); and those with a Zionist affiliation (such as the Blau-Weiss, founded in 1912). There were also Jewish sports clubs and Jewish student fraternities, although no Jewish sororities. In 1933, ninety-seven Jewish youth groups registered in Germany.41

Thereafter, Jewish groups expanded significantly. By 1936, 50,000 youths between twelve and twenty-five, about 60 percent of the total, had joined. From early on, their realm of action was limited: members could no longer
camp in public places, wear uniforms, or appear in group formation. In addition, the groups were in constant flux as members emigrated or left for apprenticeships and agricultural training centers. Nevertheless, they played an important role, providing teens with a haven from work, school, or tense families. They also helped some teens question the political judgments of parents who hoped to remain in Germany, making the younger people more eager to flee. And they helped others challenge the bourgeois illusions of parents who still aspired to good careers for their children, focusing the teens on careers useful for emigration.

An example of an organization for those who preferred a Jewish, but not Zionist, orientation was the Association of German-Jewish Youth (Bund deutsch-jüdischer Jugend, renamed Bund der jüdischen Jugend in 1936). The association included about 5,000 members in sixteen provincial organizations. Its members, mostly in their teens, included students, apprentices, employees, and the unemployed. Most were from the middle or lower middle class, with some from the working class. Many had come from German organizations and had little in common with the others, except their rejection by former friends. They "resolved to go back to our roots, to Jewish history" and met in private homes, offices, and camps to study with teachers. Open to a Jewish identity, theirs was not a rejection of Germany as such: "We loved the idyllic lakes, romantic rivers and picturesque towns," the "other Germany" of "Goethe, Schiller and Lessing." Their loyalty to an
The Daily Lives of Jewish Children

Enlightened Germany notwithstanding, many sought retraining by the organization for skills useful in countries of emigration. In 1936, a farm, Gross-Breesen, in Silesia, became the site for some of these non-Zionist youth to prepare for a life of manual labor until it, too, was overrun by the SS in November 1938.

One of the largest groups before the Nazi takeover had been the Jewish Pathfinders, with sixty-five locals in 1931–32. After fusing with the Zionist Maccabi Hazair in 1934, the JPF-MH became the largest Jewish youth group in Germany. The following year the Zionists claimed membership by over 60 percent of all Jewish youth in ten major organizations. Zionists provided Hachsharah centers—agricultural training to ready young people for Palestine. Zionists also educated Jewish youth about Judaism—subjects they had never known, had been poorly taught, or had forgotten. Some teens, under the pressure of wildly erratic times, rapidly changed allegiances, swinging within one year from secular Jewish nationalism to German antifascism, and even to Jewish religiosity.

This coming together of Jewish youth both reflected and intensified a generation gap with parents. Young people saw no future for themselves in Germany, whereas many parents clung to whatever they still had. The generation gap—this difference in outlook—was brought into sharp relief upon the death of Hindenburg in 1934. Arnold Paucker, a member of the Jewish youth movement in these years, reported that most youths laughed at the sadness with which their parents—from all positions on the political spectrum—greeted the president’s death. Young Jews felt no loss. Moreover, he added that most insisted on having some fun. They clung to the hopes and dreams of youth: even in the darkest times there was a will to live, a lust for life, and silliness and humor among Jewish boys and girls.

The generation gap was particularly apparent between acculturated parents and newly Zionist children. Young people crystallized their hopes and also found solace in joining a new culture and preparing, mentally at least, to leave. However, since well before the 1930s, many parents had opposed Zionism politically and philosophically. In Bielefeld, for example, the Zionist Pathfinders “defined themselves as an internal Jewish opposition and understood their oppositional behavior as a conscious answer (even before 1933) to the process of societal exclusion.” Their official Zionism notwithstanding, in 1934 the Bielefeld group still “acted ... 'covertly Zionist.' An open affirmation of a Zionist youth movement would have provoked an incalculable negative reaction among parents.” Other parents, less politically engaged, simply feared that their children would emigrate to distant Palestine. Ruth Sass, born in 1919, was attracted to Zionist youth.
groups, but her mother “did not want me to get the idea in my head to leave and go far away.”46

The transformation of Margot Spiegel is typical of many Jewish youth. She felt strongly attached to her German heritage, which she described as a love of nature and a romantic feeling for the ideals of Schiller and Goethe. As a teenager, she belonged to a German hiking and singing club. When she once expressed reservations about continuing with this group, her “Aryan” friend urged her to remain, adding that she did not look Jewish and that, therefore, the others “won’t know.” This remark badly hurt her feelings, and she withdrew immediately. Instead, she sought out Jewish teens who were organizing for the first time. They had lived in the same town, Constance, for nineteen years without having felt the need to know each other. Suddenly they thirsted for knowledge about Judaism, the Bible, and Jewish history, “in order to find consolation and an understandable reason for everything that happened.” Step-by-step they approached Zionism. Her attachment to this new creed infuriated her father, a veteran of World War I, and he refused to speak with her for weeks.47

Regardless of parental disapproval, Jewish youth thrived on the activities and institutions set up by private or community groups. For example, when it became clear that Jews were either unwelcome in or prohibited from using German youth hostels, “Haus Bertha” was founded in July 1934 in cooperation with the League of Jewish War Veterans for use by Jewish groups. In the midst of forests and heaths twelve miles outside of Gelsenkirchen, it lasted until 1937, when the Nazis closed it. The visiting teenagers played sports, took hikes, and attended lectures on Jewish themes. According to the lodgers, the hostel was “a ray of hope ... if only for a short time.” Another sixteen-year-old boy believed his training there gave him the “backbone” to overcome the enormous adjustments of emigration. One visitor summed up the short three-year existence of the hostel by commenting that it gave “many hundreds of Jewish boys and girls” vacations which they could not have had anywhere else in Germany.48

Half-Jewish teens, or “Mischlinge,” often had a harder time finding a circle of friends than did Jewish teens. Excluded from most “Aryan” clubs and activities, they were also isolated from Jewish activities. At first, many children and young people of mixed background attempted to deny their part-Jewish origins. They could no longer hide their origins by the age of ten, however, when most “Aryans” entered Nazi youth groups. Christian groups had the same requirements as the Nazi groups. A young Protestant woman, considered a Jew because she had three Jewish grandparents, could not find a place to live with Christians or Jews. Training to be a nurse, she was not
allowed to live at the Jewish Hospital in Hanover because she was Christian, and she was also thrown out of the room she had rented by "Aryans" who refused to live with a "non-Aryan." She ultimately found refuge in a Christian shelter for what were then called "fallen women." Cordelia Edvardson, a Catholic with three Jewish grandparents, was asked to leave her Catholic girls' group. The leader told her that the club would suffer if she continued to belong, adding: "You know our slogan: One for all and all for one." Cordelia sadly acquiesced, wondering why this was not the moment to stress the "all for one." Discouraged and isolated, she did not join Jewish groups either.

A handful of half-Jewish teens were lucky enough to join Quaker youth groups, which were few and far between. There, one young woman met "Mischlinge like me, 'first-or even second-degree,' or children of parents in concentration camps or otherwise politically persecuted." These Quaker-led teens sang German folk songs, played games, went on hikes, and "behaved like German youth generally behaved. Of course, we did not have to—or were not allowed to, depending on one's perspective—join the Hitler Youth or the BDM." Most teens of mixed parentage, however, stood exposed, unsuitable for any groups. One teen noted that the feelings of even those "Aryans" who expressed sympathy could be summarized in the statement "They can't help it, that their parents . . ."—a sentiment of pity but not equality.

Denied social integration, Jewish teens could also expect a dismal future in the German economy. The limits set on Jews at trade and vocational schools, as well as their exclusion from universities and institutions of higher learning, restricted employment possibilities. The Nazis even blocked those few who managed to pass the Ph.D. exam, as did Lotte Dixon in 1937. The Gestapo seized her thesis and notes (and she received the actual degree only after the war). In addition, Jewish job training programs were limited, and Jewish businesses, where a teen might have apprenticed, were closing down. Despite the Jewish community's training centers, the number of applicants continually outnumbered the slots available. Also, decrees time and again eliminated career choices. For example, by 1935 some provinces had declared that women teachers of agricultural home economics could only be "Aryans" and that only "Aryan" women could take exams to qualify as midwives, social workers, or physical therapists. While before 1933 Jewish girls would have looked forward to business or professional careers, by mid-1935 the apprenticeship office for Jewish girls reported that half were applying to become seamstresses. By 1937, when young women had shifted their focus to jobs useful in countries of
emigration, 24 percent of graduates from Jewish schools planned to learn a craft. They largely preferred tailoring (20 percent), because, as one woman maintained, “sewing knows no language.” Sixteen percent trained for domestic service, 13 percent for commerce, and 12 percent for social work. By the end of 1937, about thirty institutions offered some training in home economics. And, lest girls harbor unrealistic notions about continuing at a university abroad, they were warned “that Jewish girls in and out of Germany have almost no chance to study [at the university]. The few scholarships available are only for young men.”

What a narrowing of career prospects meant in practice can be seen through the experience of Annemarie Scherman, aged sixteen in 1933. Originally she had wanted to become a goldsmith, but because she was a “Mischling” she could no longer apprentice in Germany. So she learned about pediatric nursing, passing the course exam with commendations, but was prohibited from taking the state exam. When she tried to enroll to study medicine at the university, she had to sit on a bench for Jewish students and carry student identification with a yellow stripe across it. Unhappily, she tried to become a medical assistant but found that this pursuit was barred to Jews and “Mischlinge.” Finally, she took a business course, learning stenography, typing, and other secretarial skills. She passed her exam in 1938 but could not find a job because every application form asked her “racial” history. She finally found a job at a newspaper for a brief interlude and then worked as an assistant to a doctor who opposed the
regime. She was lucky compared with those even younger. By 1942, “first-degree Mischlinge” could no longer attend any German schools.

Parents and children frequently clashed regarding the vision each had of the child’s future. Such clashes were particularly frequent between girls and their parents. One school survey in 1935 indicated that girls preferred jobs in offices or working with children (such as kindergarten teaching), whereas parents thought they should become seamstresses or work in a household setting. Parents were more likely to go along with boys’ choices of crafts or agricultural training. Moreover, except for housework, the opportunities for girls were more limited than for boys. Welfare organizations suggested sewing-related jobs, such as knitting, tailoring, or making clothing decorations, whereas options recommended for boys included becoming painters, billboard designers, upholsterers, shoemakers, dyers, tailors, or skilled industrial workers.

To make matters worse, parents seem to have preferred keeping girls home, either to shelter them from unpleasant work or so they could help out. In early 1937, one report on vocational training for youth suggested that 70 percent of girls leaving school refused any sort of training. Parents kept them at home to assist with the household. In his memoirs, for example, Ezra BenGershom described how his father decided that he and his two brothers should receive vocational training but that his one unmarried sister should help out in the house.

In addition to family strategies, the blame for the relatively small number of girls in training programs also lay with Jewish community welfare organizations. They often gave boys preferential treatment in career training and offered them greater varieties of training and subsidies. In 1937, a self-critical report of the Central Bureau for Economic Relief noted that girls made up only 25 percent of its trainees. In 1938, the League of Jewish Women announced that one provincial welfare office had given subsidies to seventy-two boys but only ten girls.

Jewish papers urged families to provide some household training to their daughters, encouraging parents to accept the loss of bourgeois class status implicit in this move. An article entitled “My Daughter Does Not Need That!” chastised mothers who rejected having their daughters trained as servants. Still, the old-fashioned idea that girls did not need a career because they would ultimately marry lingered on in some families, even as that fantasy became more and more inconsistent with reality. Some girls may have felt protected by their parents’ decisions. Others were no doubt frustrated, their anxiety stirred by their lack of any training suitable for emigration. Only those who had joined a youth group might have the
political perspective and psychological strength to insist on such training against their parents’ wishes. In July 1936, the emigration preparatory training school at Gross-Breesen could not fill its girls’ section but had to turn down four hundred boys.\(^{57}\)

### CHILDREN LEAVE HOME

Between 1934 and 1939, thousands of parents made the agonizing decision to send their children out of Germany and into the unknown, either on what were called “children’s transports” (Kindertransporte) or by themselves. At least 18,000 “unaccompanied children” left Germany. Many teenagers departed, often for Switzerland or England, as parents with means found study opportunities for them. Other teens headed abroad on their own after preparing at agricultural training centers. Some of these centers were founded outside Germany, such as the agricultural training center for Jewish apprentices, Werkdorp Nieuwesluis, established in Holland in 1934. By 1936, there were centers in ten other European lands, where 843 young men and 288 young women trained for agricultural careers, the women mostly in home economics.\(^{58}\)

Still others managed to get out as menial laborers, for girls and young women generally as household servants or apprentices. Typically, they saw their departures as permanent, with few expecting to return. Theirs was an assessment of the long-range political prospects. Many, like Ruth Eisner, had pressed for their whole families to emigrate. When her father refused, the sixteen-year-old finally begged: “At least let me go!” Some children expected to return to Germany to visit their parents. To their dismay, the government soon forbade their reentry. When one fifteen-year-old visited her parents in the mid-1930s, she was threatened with arrest unless she left the country immediately. In 1938, sixteen-year-old Miriam Carlebach understood her Palestine certificate to be a “life guarantee.” As she waited to embark, bureaucrats stamped her passport three times: first with the red J for Jew; next with permission to take 30 marks out of the country; and finally with a declaration that she would never be allowed to enter Germany again.\(^{59}\)

Parents searched for family or friends abroad to take in their children. One mother, appealing to her sister in New York in late 1938, declared:

Lately, I have often been sick of my life, but . . . one has duties to one’s children. On June 15, Rolly turned thirteen! . . . I am very concerned about his future. He wants to go to America, not Palestine. Wouldn’t it be possible
for you to find a family there who would take the boy in . . . ? Naturally, I

can't think of a separation, but . . . that is how it is for all parents today, all

must send their children abroad. 60

Even before the November Pogrom, British rescue groups, including the

Quakers, brought German-Jewish refugee children to England, but the

numbers were small. Spurred into more intense action by the pogrom,

these groups formed the first major transports of children, leaving Berlin,

Hamburg, and Vienna in December 1938. Zionists also increased their

efforts after the pogrom, bringing more agricultural apprentices into Pale­

tine than ever. 61 The Kindertransporte took between 8,000 and 10,000 chil­
dren to England (after November 1938), 3,400 to Palestine, and some to

other European countries and the United States. 62 There they received fos­
ter care or, in the case of Palestine, lived on kibbutzim or in children's

homes until their parents could join them. Many parents never made it.

The children who went to Palestine did so under the auspices of Youth

Aliyah. Pioneered by Recha Freier in Berlin and supported financially by

Hadassah, the Zionist women's organization in the United States, it resuced

over 3,200 children from Germany. It required 60 percent boys and 40 per­
cent girls because of what its leaders considered the division of labor on the

collective farms where the children would work. 63

For children, the Kindertransporte could be a terribly wrenching experi­
ence, a considerable adventure, or both. Feelings of adventure crop up in

men's memoirs of their teen years. Charles Marks wrote: "To me it was an

adventure; to [my parents] it must have been agony." Some children went

abroad in one direction while their parents fled in another. In a letter to rela­
atives abroad, one woman worried that her friends were heading toward

Shanghai while their children traveled to England on a Kindertransport but

conceded: "None of this devastates us anymore, we are used to much

worse." 64

For parents, the decision to send off a child was the most excruciating

moment of their lives. The expression "children turned into letters" (aus

Kindern wurden Briefe) revealed their despair. One woman recalled that

when she received her papers at eighteen to emigrate to England as a gov­
erness, her mother fainted. Many mothers on their own, with husbands

either abroad or in concentration camps, made the agonizing decision to

send their children out of Germany, and they suffered intensely from the

loss of daily intimacy. Herta Beuthner, whose husband was in Argentina,

sent their son to Palestine to avoid his induction at fifteen into forced labor:

"The separation from my only child was heartbreaking. For many days and
nights I lay in my bed, crying, and didn’t want to live any more.”

Some mothers could not bear the thought of parting from their children. Almost fifty years later, Miriam Gillis-Carlebach recalled that when she told her mother that she wanted to leave for Palestine, Lotte Carlebach covered her face and cried, “My only Miriam.” The teenager tried to console her: “But Mommy! Eight children will remain at home with you!” Her mother would not be comforted: “Each child is my only child. I yearn for you already.” Whereas Lotte Carlebach sympathized with her daughter’s desires and approved of her emigration, Ruth Klüger’s mother showed no such understanding. As a result, both mother and daughter wound up in Auschwitz. Both survived, but even late in life, Ruth Klüger recalled her frustration when her mother refused to let her join a children’s transport. A young man from the Jewish community had told her mother there was one last chance to send her child to Palestine:

My heart pounded, for I would have loved to leave, even if it had been a betrayal of her. But she didn’t ask me or even look at me once, rather she said, “No. One does not separate a child from her mother.” On the way home I struggled with my disappointment, which I could not express to her without hurting her. I believe I never forgave her for this.

These children were willing to cut all ties with their homeland. Parents feared an unknown future abroad. Children, however, reacted almost viscerally to present dangers at home.

By 1939, 82 percent of children aged fifteen and under and 83 percent of youth aged sixteen to twenty-four had managed to escape Germany. The remaining Jewish children and teens had fewer and fewer friends, especially outside the big cities. By 1937, in Hessen-Nassau, for example, seventy-eight communities counted fewer than ten Jewish children and teens, and only thirteen communities counted between twenty and thirty-five children and teens. Opportunities for those increasingly nervous and frightened children who remained—the Kindertransporte, like other exits, were never sufficient—continued to dwindle. By July 1941, about 25,000 Jewish children and youth under age twenty-five still lived within the borders of pre-1938 Germany.